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PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ON THE BASIS OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 44/228 AND AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OTHER RELEVANT GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS

ACTIVITIES OF THE CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT

Position paper of the European Community and its member States on "Agenda 21"

Introduction

1. Agenda 21 will form, together with the conventions on climate change and bio-diversity, a global consensus on forestry and the Earth Charter, the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, that will be held in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

2. Although the report of the Secretary-General of the Conference on the structure and organization of Agenda 21 (A/CONF.151/PC/42) provides the Member States with many suggestions and ideas, the concept is not yet fully clear; both the concept and its elaboration is deliberately left open for further discussion amongst Member States. It is for that reason that we want to offer some of our own thoughts with regard to a possible Agenda 21.

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Purpose of the agenda

3. We would see Agenda 21 as a high-level political commitment to an action plan for the coming years. It should serve as a binding agenda for the United Nations as a whole and reflect a political commitment of Member States to pursue vigorously the objectives and actions both nationally and in the competent international organizations. It would also give guidance and inspiration to action at the regional, national and local levels.

4. It should address Governments, international organizations and regional economic integration organizations, such as the European Community, but should also reach out to other actors such as non-governmental organizations, industry and the scientific community.

Structure and content of the agenda

5. The agenda could be composed of:

(a) Global goals;

(b) Specific objectives and targets in the various issue areas;

(c) Action proposals.

6. With regard to the global goals, we believe that these should be of a general nature and of a limited number. They would serve as a general framework in which we will operate and reflect in a balanced way both our main environmental and developmental aims. The global goals should not overlap with the Earth Charter.

7. The specific objectives and targets in the various issue areas should be established by sector and by actor. They should be concise, realistic and, in so far as possible, precise. Different specific objectives and targets could be set for different categories of countries and where relevant other actors. Time schedules for achieving the objectives and targets should be set where possible and could be differentiated according to the stage of development.

8. The action proposals are the central element in Agenda 21. Since we expect varying degrees of agreement in 1992 on the actions to be taken after the Conference, depending on the progress we will have been able to make in our negotiations, we believe that a process-oriented approach should be taken that would allow a further development and strengthening of Agenda 21 and particularly its specific objectives and actions.

9. Action proposals should describe the responsibilities and activities at the national, regional and the international level; where appropriate it should also be made clear which international organization will take the lead in pursuing the proposal at the international level. This organization will have the responsibility for the implementation and further development of the agreed action proposals.

10. In the formulation of the action proposals in the various issue areas, priorities have to be established.

11. Actions that have been formulated after 1992 to implement Agenda 21, or to further develop it, should be fed into the database of the Agenda 21.

12. In each issue area financial and technological needs should be spelt out as far as possible on the basis of which concrete commitments can be made for the short term. With regard to the costing and financing of the various action proposals in the longer term, we would suggest that a process-oriented or "rolling" approach be taken. We do not expect that by 1992 we will be able to have a clear and well-founded picture of the precise costs of all the actions we would envisage for the coming years. Neither would it be realistic to assume that in 1992 sources for funding of all the actions can be identified.

13. It is clear that the greater part of the financing has to come through setting different priorities in the national budgetary and fiscal policies, as well as through the private sector. At the same time the international community should make a firm commitment that it will provide the necessary support to developing countries in order to assist them to meet the global objectives and to take the necessary regional and national action to protect their environment and their resource base. Crucial in this respect will be a central funding mechanism, like an evolving Global Environmental Facility, to meet the global environmental externalities, with a credible amount of financial resources and an appropriate governing structure.

14. An elaboration of a "partnership" on an issue by issue basis can best take place in the fora that take the lead in implementing and pursuing the action proposals.

Implementation and monitoring

15. With respect to the monitoring of the implementation of Agenda 21 various methods can be used. First of all the various designated lead agencies and organizations, and the members and observers of their governing bodies, have a clear responsibility in implementing and monitoring the implementation of the agreed action proposals. Performance reports and peer pressure should be used to ensure commitment towards the objectives and the fulfilment of the action proposals.

16. Also the United Nations, and particularly the General Assembly, will continue to have an overall role in reviewing global action.

17. One idea that has been suggested is the creation of a regular high-level meeting or other mechanism, preferably at the ministerial level, that would give general policy guidance to the implementation of the objectives and action proposals of the Conference and which would consider possible gaps. This idea is among a number of other ideas that should be further studied and elaborated. It is important that any solution should contribute to an improved integration of environment and development and should be related satisfactorily to an evolving Global Environmental Facility.

18. At the secretariat level, we could support new arrangements that would strengthen the inter-agency coordination. One possibility would be to revive the Environmental Coordination Board (possibly extended to an Environment and Development Board) which would be responsible for monitoring overall progress by the international community on the implementation of Agenda 21. Such an Environment and Development Board should report periodically through the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the body or bodies entrusted with guardianship of Agenda 21 and to the United Nations General Assembly. An Environment and Development Board may also draw to the attention of the secretariats of competent conventions, international and regional bodies, information relevant to the activities for which they are competent. The Environment and Development Board would be supported by a small unit composed of staff seconded by the involved organizations, would manage the information flows and be responsible for the continuous updates of the database of Agenda 21.

Conclusions

19. In summary, the European Community and its member States consider Agenda 21 a fundamental document that should be action-oriented and start a new process based on a dynamic approach that will ensure its full effect well into the twenty-first century.